DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 316 165 HE 023 290

AUTHOR	Rees, Eileen; And Others
TITLE	New Center for Learning: Basic Concepts, Goals, and Contributions to ETSU.
INSTITUTION	East Texas State Univ., Commerce. New Center for Learning.
PUB DATE	88
NOTE	14p.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Descriptive (141)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Educational Quality; Excellence in Education; *Faculty Development; General Education; Graduation Requirements; Higher Education; Integrated Activities; *Integrated Curriculum; Interdisciplinary Approach; Nontraditional Education; Required Courses; *Student Development
IDENTIFIERS	*East Texas State University; East Texas State University New Center Learning

ABSTRACT

The New Center for Learning (NCL) at East Texas State University (ETSU), now in its 13th year, offers an alternative way for students to satisfy most of the general education requirements at ETSU via an integrated interdisciplinary curriculum. For faculty, it offers a vehicle for expanding their knowledge, improving teaching techniques, experimenting, and developing greater collegiality. The curriculum is intended to provide students with a connected view, starting with individual concerns and moving to larger social groups and ultimately the world community. NCL predates the national reform movement, using many components to achieve its goals (integrated curriculum, interdisciplinary in all courses, team-teaching, creative teaching strategies, and careful selection of faculty). The program consists of 12 3-hour courses (e.g., Self, Theories of Human Nature, American Character, Society and Values, Science and Society, and The Global Village). The NCL contribution to ETSU's goals include: financial stability (through improved student retention, recruitment and marketing potential, and revenue neutrality); faculty development; and educational excellence. An attachment discusses revenue. (SM)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED316165

NEW CENTER FOR LEARNING:

Basic Concepts, Goals, and Contributions to ETSU

Eileen Rees, Director
Dr. Jim Reynolds
Dr. Harry Wade

HISTORY, NATIONAL REPUTATION, AND ENROLLMENT

The New Center for Learning (NCL), now in its thirteenth year, provides an alternative way for students to satisfy most of the general education requirements at ETSU through an integrated interdisciplinary curriculum. Thus for students, its primary goals are to help them to recognize and understand the complex contexts in which their lives take shape, to prepare them to meet the challenges of living in the 21st century, and to foster the desire to continue learning once the formal part of their education is over. For faculty, it provides a vehicle for expanding their knowledge, improving teaching techniques, experimenting and innovation, and developing greater collegiality. "To be truly competitive," says SMU's William F. May, "a university has to offer something distinctive." The New Center for Learning makes ETSU unique, since nothing comparable is available at other Texas public universities.

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
New Center for Learning
East Texas State University
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

HE 023 290

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

History and Enrollment: NCL originated in 1974, when President F.H. McDowell, after learning about New College at the University of Alabama, commissioned a group of faculty to develop a comparable innovative program at ETSU. A two-year FIPSE grant funded the initial stages of the program which enrolled its first students in fall 1975. We began with a small group of students and faculty; over the years this has expanded to our current enrollment in fall 1987 of 209 students taking 290 classes and 13 faculty members teaching either one or two NCL courses. Over 1500 students and 40 faculty members have participated in the program during the past 12 years. We usually attract from 10-20% of entering freshmen; in fall 1987, we enrolled 22% of the new freshmen.

Moreover, NCL both attracts students and develops a significant number of student leaders. We can claim more than our share of student senators, Golden Leo's, Freshmen Leadership class members, Orientation leaders, Housing R.A.'s, Student Activities Board chairpersons, and publication editors (for one three year period, all *East Texas* editors were NCL veterans, for instance). The close relationship between NCL and these kinds of student organizations is also evidenced by the frequent occasions when NCL faculty are called on to provide training, speeches, workshops or colloquia for student groups.

National reputation: As NCL developed, it has become a nationally known interdisciplinary program. Typically, we made at least one presentation at a national conference each year, until out-of-state travel monies were no longer available. We have had articles in several publications, including *Perspectives: The Journal of the Association for General and Liberal Studies, The Southern*

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Humanities Review, and *Renewing Liberal Education: A Primer* by Francis J. Wuest. Each of these resulted in inquiries about the program from all over the United States. An article by one of our students, Dana McGuire, will appear in the spring issue of *Voices of Youth*, a publication of the Meiklijohn Education Foundation. The NCL program is listed and described in *Interdisciplinary Undergraduate Programs: A Directory* published by the Association for Integrative Studies in 1986.

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

NCL predates national reform movement: In many ways, NCL anticipated what have become major national trends in general education, as evidenced by recent reports on undergraduate education issued by NEH, NIE, and AAC. The authors of the AAC report, *Integrity in the College Curriculum: A Report to the Academic Community*, seem to have NCL in mind when they write that "We believe that on every campus there can be assembled for productive work faculty who care deeply about good teaching and about a curriculum that would give substance, vitality, and coherence to undergraduate education." The report's emphasis on active learning and interdisciplinary studies supports what NCL has been doing for over twelve years. Student involvement, high expectations, and assessment and feedback are recommended in the NIE report, *Involvement in Learning*, as conditions of excellence in undergraduate education. The New Center curriculum and learning strategies are designed to involve students in learning and our many writing assignments and projects give students constant feedback. In discussing "Bright spots in the curriculum" the NEH report, *To Reclaim A Legacy*,

points out the weaknesses of "distribution requirements" in general education and then states "A few colleges and universities have rejected this model in favor of a course of studies in which all students share a carefully designed learning experience." Which is, of course, what NCL has been striving for since nine years before the report was written. One college that adopted the core model "reports that its faculty are enlivened intellectually by teaching the core courses and that students' writing has improved considerably as a result of a 'Writing Across the Core' program. Students, too, are excited by the new curriculum. They say they are able to see relationships among fields, and they talk about a renewed sense of a community of learning, a community that includes faculty, students, and administrators." It would be hard to describe the New Center for Learning experience better than this.

NCL components: We use a variety of means to achieve our goals: an integrated curriculum, interdisciplinarity in all courses, team-teaching, creative teaching strategies, and careful selection of dedicated faculty. Throughout the program, we emphasize what have come to be known as our 6 Cs--Critical Thinking, Communication, Comprehension, Connections, Commitment, and Community.

Curriculum: Our curriculum provides students with a "connected view" in that it starts with individual concerns and moves to larger social groups and ultimately the world community. In addition, it emphasizes connections between the past, present, and future. Interdisciplinarity is integral to each course. Although each course has a disciplinary prefix, content is never limited to a

single disciplinary approach because life is interdisciplinary. Rather, materials and methods from several areas are represented. Team teaching in NCL is not "turn teaching" but rather what Webster and Calhoun at the University of North Carolina have called "concert teaching," in which all team members are intimately involved in all aspects of the course, from planning through classroom participation to evaluation and grading. Our teaching strategies are varied, with little emphasis on lecture and traditional testing, and extensive use of both large and small group discussion, individual and group independent learning projects, and demonstration of learning through writing. Our faculty choose to teach in NCL, are dedicated to its purposes and its students, and are willing to invest the extra time and effort it requires.

The program consists of 12 three hour courses; ideally a student takes two related courses each semester, although in practice this often does not happen. The freshmen level courses focus on the individual. ***Self*** (Eng 188) helps students discover, through reading and writing, who they are and what forces have shaped them. ***Theories of Human Nature*** (Psy 188) looks at what it means to be human by studying several philosophical and psychological theories. ***Self and Others*** (Eng 288) considers relationships with family, friends, and loved ones, while the companion course, ***Self and Values*** (Eng 289) considers how we make ethical decisions and how they affect our lives. The sophomore level courses move out to consider society as well as the individual. ***American Character*** (Hist 188), which looks at what it means to be an American, is paired with a course in comparative cultures, ***America and China*** (PSci 288), in which students become acquainted with an entirely different society, and see our own

society through different eyes. ***America and the World*** (Hist 189) considers America's role in the 20th century, whereas ***Society and Values*** (PSci 289) acquaints them with the effect of American values on their lives and America's international role. The science courses, ***Science and the Environment*** (BSc 289) and ***Science and Society*** (Chem 289) look at our relationship to the physical world and the influence of science and technological change on our lives. The capstone courses, ***Shaping the Future*** (Eco 388) and ***The Global Village*** (Hist 388), consider alternative scenarios proposed by futurists and the challenges of world interdependency,

NCL CONTRIBUTION TO ETSU'S GOALS

Financial Stability

Retention: Of the 145 students enrolled in NCL in the fall 1986, 101 were still enrolled in ETSU in the fall 1987, for a retention rate of 69.6% compared to an overall university freshman to sophomore retention rate of 55%. (For rough estimate of what this rate means in dollars and cents, please see attachment #1). Several features of NCL likely contribute to this above average retention:

a. We work hard to achieve a "support group" atmosphere in NCL classes because research shows that students struggling with lots of ambiquity succeed in their struggles if they are in an emotionally supportive environment. We know students' names early; we ask them to call faculty by first names; we require, read and respond personally to personal journals by students; we stress open discussion and tolerance of diverse

ideas in class; and we generally pay attention to individuals in ways that they recognize and appreciate.

b. We build into classes proven "college survival skills" such as time management, personal goal and value clarification, summary writing, and explicit attention to critical thinking and writing in our interdisciplinary context.

c. When ETSU made it possible for students to preregister, NCL developed a model for encouraging preregistation and early academic advising for our students. The University Academic Advising office is now recommending that model to academic departments.

Recruitment and marketing potential: The New Center is unique among Texas public colleges and universities, offering the kind of liberal education core available only at a few selective and expensive private colleges. Given the target markets ET recruiters aim for in high schools--the top students in smaller, rural schools and the second level (ACT 20-25 or so) students in the bigger city schools--NCL seems to us to offer lots of recruiting potential. Moreover, our experience over the years has been that returning, over-25 adult students flourish in the NCL atmosphere, and a number of them have suggested that NCL should recruit older students more aggressively. Although university recruiters and marketing strategists have always seemed reluctant to use NCL as bait for potential students, we think new students could be attracted to ETSU by the prospect of enrolling in NCL classes. NCL offers exactly the kind of "special opportunity" that regular students appreciate and yet that is now

available only to the very best ET students through the Honors program and to the highest risk students through Mach III.

Revenue neutrality: With a student teacher ratio of about 15 to 1, NCL costs no more than the university average to operate. We achieve this neutrality by teaching overloads and by persuading qualified non-faculty to participate in our team-teaching model, which is essential to the kinds of curriculum we offer and to the kind of atmosphere we create.

Faculty Development

Faculty who teach in NCL have to learn new skills and information. Moreover, they participate in a new kind of collegiality, one in which they are asked to work with colleagues in planning and teaching courses not exclusively in their speciality or even in their discipline. Most find the experience invigorating and renewing. One New Center regular says that "It saved my sanity and got me out of a rut. I learned to appreciate students more and colleagues a lot more." "I went through a teacher training program," claims another, " but learned more about teaching in NCL, by team teaching--can't teach behind closed doors." "Like a sabbatical" is the way a third NCL teacher describes teaching courses in New Center. Another states that the New Center experience made him "a much better teacher--much better at what I do in my department."

In a time when ETSU will be asking faculty to change in a variety of ways to adapt to changing coditions, NCL can provide for some a kind of half-way house,

a place where they can begin to experience personal change and renewal in a supportive, innovative and pleasurable atmosphere. Those of us who struggle to keep up with NCL enjoy it; the learning and adapting we do is fun, partly because we do it together.

Educational Excellence

a. General education: Although some people at ETSU feel threatened by NCL's innovation, the fact is that the New Center has been on the cutting edge of general education reform for over a decade. The several national studies and reports mentioned above called for the kinds of reforms that NCL had implemented years earlier. Moreover, because NCL has succeeded at ETSU since 1975, when the university began its study and revision of the general education program, experience with many of the kinds of reforms needed (interdisciplinarity, writing-across-the-curriculum, cross-cultural thinking, etc.) was already available. While some at ETSU approve neither of NCL nor of ET's new University Studies program, it is clear that the University Studies plan is more in tune with needed national reform than was General Studies, just as it is indisputable that University Studies benefitted from what we in NCL had learned over the years.

b, Teaching excellence: The 13 people teaching in the New Center this fall have won 7 university teaching excellence awards, and all consider themselves NCL regulars. All would agree, additionally, that NCL does more than simply attract people who are good teachers in other settings, it

helps all of us become better teachers. NCL deserves some of the credit for winning these awards.

c. Integrative thinking: The New Center's curriculum is designed to be taken sequentially and is a carefully integrated "core curriculum." Those relatively few students who have taken most or all of the curriculum testify that the curriculum works: they see the world and their experience as more of a whole, they understand and feel the interconnectedness of things. One such student stated "I realize how damn lucky I was to have stumbled into New Center, I say this not because of the actual material that I have studied because any information that I really want I can learn on my own. Rather it is the new perceptions I have gained, the new ways of thinking and looking at the world that make me glad that the program exists."

But the majority of NCL students don't take the whole curriculum; they mix it with regular general education courses or Honors courses. Even so, most of these who take more than one or two NCL classes tell us in their journals and course evaluations that they are more aware of connections between their courses, that they begin to see how NCL courses help give "meaning" to regular courses, that they come to understand how their NCL learning is relevant to the lives they lead as students and will lead as college graduates and citizens in the world of work.

NEEDS AND OPPORTUNITIES

University commitment: Our chief need for the future is some assurance of a future and the ability to plan. The kinds of innovation and team-teaching and planning that we do require that we know how many people we will have available to teach and who they are. We recommend that each spring the ETSU administration make a firm commitment to NCL for a specified number of specific people to teach in the program for the next academic year. Commitment beyond a year would be better. Commitment less than a year is nearly useless, though better than none. Waiting until the 12th day to tell us who is available for that semester is not satisfactory.

Non-Traditional students: As we suggested above, NCL might help alleviate university budgetary pressures by attracting more of the adult students, who respond very well to the program. We might try offering NCL classes during the late afternoon or evening, times more suitable to non-traditional students. However, university support is essential to the success of this project.

We have often felt that many opportunities have been missed by NCL and the university because of the lack of university long range commitment. Hand-to-mouth existence is not conducive to maximum effectiveness. We have expanded our class size to the maximum possible for this type of teaching, yet still have difficulty in securing the required number of faculty. With assured, long range

support, NCL could further contribute to student recruitment and retention, to faculty development, and to meeting the needs of traditional and non-traditional students.

ATTACHMENT # 1

A freshmen student enrolled for 16 low level credit hours (9 in humanities/social science and 7 in math/science) will generate approximately $1244 a semester, or $2488 a year without summer school, in revenues, as follows:

in-state tuition, fees	$457
formula funding	
faculty salaries	657
department operating	130
	$1244

If the 145 students enrolled in NCL in fall 1986 left ETSU at our "normal" rate of 45%, we would have lost 65 students. Instead, we lost only 44, for a difference of 21 students "retained." If these 21 students stayed at ETSU only one addfitional year, even if they took only low level courses, they would generate an additional $52,248.

Compared to the overall university's record, NCL is doing well.